

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Quality Laundry Building

AGENDA ITEM: C

OWNERS: Pejman “PJ” Jamea, 1110 W Gray, LLC

HPO FILE NO.: 18L324

APPLICANTS: Amanda Barry, MacRostie Historic Advisors

DATE ACCEPTED: May -25-2018

LOCATION: 1110 W Gray Street – Montrose

HAHC HEARING: JUNE-14-2018

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 14, 15 & E Part Lots 16 & 17 Block 3 of Columbus, Lots 1-4, S/E 50’, Block 2 of Macdonald, and 4.6’x81.60’ of Large Lot 43, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a one-story, brick commercial structure with an attached one-story side show room, and a two-story garage addition.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

Meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Quality Laundry Building was constructed circa 1932 as a one-story, brick, Art Deco style commercial building on the corner of W Gray and Montrose Boulevard. Quality Laundry was owned by Josiah Si Hawkins and FW Heite beginning in 1926. By 1929, Hawkins was the sole owner and opened several branches throughout the city including the location at 1110 W Gray. The building was listed as a Quality Laundry location from 1932 until 1958, when it was sold to Gibbs Ray Outboard Motors.

Gibbs Ray Outboard Motors was established in 1944 by brothers Ray and Hugh Gibbs, nephews of Mary Gibbs Jones, at the beginning of when recreational boating became a popular component of American leisure culture. The Gibbs brothers first operated their boat sales and repair business out of a residence, then another commercial property. The brothers eventually brought on their nephew, Gibbs Warley, Sr., and after Hugh Gibbs died in 1953 from complications due to mustard gas exposure, Ray and Warley, Sr. bought and relocated to the Quality Laundry Building.

The uncle and nephew made updates to the Art Deco building through the 1960s by adding a one-story, 1968 shed-roof, steel-frame showroom to the east elevation, and a prefabricated steel-frame two-story garage addition to the north side. The original commercial structure was enveloped in stucco cladding, covering up many of the original Art Deco details. However, selective demolition has revealed a portion of the original fan light above, and fluted pilasters flanking, the front-entry, and remnants of the original stucco finish.

The Quality Laundry Building at 1110 W Gray Street meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4 for Landmark Designation as an important architectural type, as well as a reminder of two important local businesses that served the City of Houston.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

Quality Laundry

Josiah Si Hawkins, Jr. was born on April 5, 1887 in Clinton, Missouri to Josiah Si Hawkins, Sr. and Mary Louise McNeil. Hawkins married Pearl Thomas circa 1921; the couple had no children. Despite having lived through both World Wars, Hawkins has no record of military service.

The 1926 City Directory reveals that Josiah S. Hawkins was Manager at Quality Laundry, located at 1904 Austin, and that he and his wife Pearl rented living space on site. Hawkins co-owned the Laundry with FW Heite. By 1929, Hawkins was sole owner of Quality Laundry and opened a branch at 2801 Polk, though the Austin location remained the primary business address. The 1930 census shows that the Hawkinses were then renting at 1301 Isabella, and it lists that Pearl was a stenographer for an oil company and the laundry company. The 1932 City Directory shows that they rented at 1108 Autrey, where they lived until Hawkins' death. In 1932 also appears the first mention of the Quality Laundry building at 1110 W. Gray. The 1110 W. Gray location was one of several branches for the laundry; other locations in 1932 included the original at 1904 Austin, one at 5101 Harrisburg, and one at 1805 St. Bernard. By 1940, the West Gray location had become the primary business address, while the other locations were listed as branches in the City Directory.

The building at 1110 W. Gray was listed as the Quality Laundry Building until the building was purchased in 1958 by Gibbs Ray Outboard Motors. Hawkins died on June 10, 1960 from a massive pulmonary embolism and was buried in Forest Park Cemetery. His death certificate notes that he was the retired owner of Quality Laundry.

Art Deco in Houston

Modernistic architecture, which encompasses Art Deco and Art Moderne design, flourished between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II. Although the style arrived in Houston comparatively late in the 1920s, it came at a critical time in the city's development, when Houston was beginning the transition from medium-sized Southern city to major American metropolis.

Prior to 1927, most architect-designed buildings in Houston were either local versions of classical revival architecture or Victorian designs adapted for the city's hot, humid climate. Modernistic architecture's growing popularity coincided with a conscious effort by Houston's business and civic leaders to tie the city's image to the American West and de-emphasize its Southern heritage. For many Houstonians, modernistic buildings represented the city's future. Modernistic buildings are not concentrated in any one neighborhood in Houston, but can be found throughout the areas of the city developed before 1950. The vast majority of modernistic structures in Houston are commercial, industrial or apartment buildings. Several major Depression-era government projects, some private residences and at least three houses of worship were also designed in the modernistic style. Some notable Art Deco buildings in Houston include the The Gulf Building (1929, 712 Main St.), the Lone Star Creamery Co. (1937, 3412 Leeland Ave.) and the Minimax Store No 1 (1930, 1200 Westheimer Rd.).

Art Deco design elements often included using stucco to create smooth wall surfaces, although brick was also common in Houston, especially on apartment and commercial buildings, having

symmetrical facades, using angular geometric forms such as zigzags and chevrons as decorative elements, and using pylons, towers and other projections above the roofline to give them their vertical orientation.

Pleasure Boating

“Pleasure boating” is documented first in the Netherlands during the 14th century. The Dutch had created small, fast sailboats called *jaghts* (“yacht” in English) for chasing smugglers and pirates, and it was not long before the wealthy began using their *jaghts* instead to celebrate returning merchant ships, and for other celebratory and entertainment purposes.

The next known documented use of watercraft for entertainment was when Charles II returned from exile in the Netherlands to England in 1660. The Dutch East India Company presented Charles II with a yacht that the king then used for sailing competitions on the Thames. Boating quickly became a popular sport among England’s wealthy and powerful. The first private pleasure boat club in the western world was established in Ireland at the Cork Water Club in 1720.

The first yacht club in the United States was established in New York City in 1844 when a group of eight gentlemen pooled their funds to construct a custom schooner for racing in English boat races. The New York Yacht Club won their first race with a boat named *America* at the Royal Yacht Squadron race in 1851, where they finished eight minutes faster than the second-place vessel. *America* held that record until 1983.

Motor boats were invented in 1886 in Germany by internal combustion engine-designer Gottlieb Daimler, and boat designer, Friedrich Lurssen. The public reacted to motorized boats with suspicion about the functionality and safety of a vessel powered by explosions. However, motor boats soon gained in popularity, spreading to Sweden and England by the 1890s. The first motor boat race was held in 1903 in Cork, Ireland.

The motor boat industry continued to grow, and its first professional organizations in the United States emerged in the 1920s. The National Outboard Association and the Marine Trade Association both formed during this period, and the first issue of the *Boating Business* trade magazine was published in 1929. Several boat and motor companies merged to form the Outboard Motors Corporation, also in 1929, forming one of the longest-lasting motor boat companies.

The Great Depression had its impact on the industry. During the 1930s, *Boating Business* ran ads asking yacht owners to take their vessels in for regular maintenance and service, to assist with employment. Manufacturers began producing new models of boats that would provide dealers with a larger profit margin. Federal investments in infrastructure and dam construction created many lakes across the country. The Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri is most famous among pleasure boaters for having almost sixty resorts ringing the lake, and caters primarily to fishing and hunting tourists.

During the early 1940s, and particularly after the Pearl Harbor bombing, American marine construction concentrated on military needs; recreational boat construction was on hold until after the war ended. The pleasure boating industry found a new surge as the post-war conditions resulted in both a population

boom and the emerging middle class. By 1947, boat sales were up by \$5.7 million, and the number of registered motorboats in the US reached 440,000.

During the 1950s, pleasure boating popularity continued to grow. One estimate from 1957 believes over 35 million people participated in boating with over 7 million pleasure boats in use. Another statistic from the decade cites that in 1950, there were fewer than 450,000 registered boats in the United States, and by 1959, boat dealers were collectively selling that amount annually.

After the growth in the 1950s with the surging middle class, the boating industry's success followed nationwide economic patterns. When the US did well, so did boat sales. However, when the American economy slumped, the boating industry suffered enormous blows as consumers cut back on luxury items to make their own ends meet.

Gibbs Boat Showroom

Gibbs Ray Outboard Motors, later Gibbs Boat Showroom, opened in 1944 at the same moment in history as recreational boating became a dominant component of American leisure culture. Gibbs first opened at a location on Fairview between Taft Street and Montrose Boulevard. The company operated as a family business for approximately seventy years before closing.

The Gibbs Ray Outboard Motors Company was founded by Ray Gibbs and Hugh Gibbs, nephews to Mary Gibbs Jones. The company started after securing a distribution contract from Johnson Outboard Motors. The brothers had a life-long love for boating, mostly through boat racing. Though Ray Gibbs was missing a leg from his service in World War I, he remained an accomplished boat mechanic. Hugh was an accomplished racer who won two races at the Freeport Regatta in 1930. Both brothers traveled to race at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. The Gibbs brothers also enjoyed duck hunting, often taking their nephew Gibbs Warley Sr. with them on their excursions.

The Gibbs operated their small business selling and repairing boats out of a residence located on 7058 Fairview, likely Ray's residence. The company stayed there for less than five years before relocating to a commercial property on Milam next door to Fire Station No. 7 (now the Houston Fire Museum) circa 1948. The move was prompted by Johnson Outboard Motors' insistence that their sales be conducted out of a commercial storefront rather than a residence. During slow periods at the firehouse, the firefighters would help the Gibbs move boats.

Gibbs Warley, Sr. joined his uncles at the company after his discharge from the US Marine Corp, where he served in the Pacific theater during World War II. Warley, Sr. grew up in Houston, attending Lanier Middle School and Lamar High School. He joined the Marines immediately following his high school graduation. Warley, Sr. spent time boating and duck hunting with his uncles as a child, and chose to enter the business with his uncles. He married his wife, Kathryn, in 1947, and they had two children: Gibbs Warley, Jr., and Charlotte.

Hugh Gibbs died in 1953 of complications due to mustard gas exposure. Ray and Warley, Sr. relocated again in 1958 to the former Quality Laundry building on West Gray. The company was ready to own its facilities rather than rent and the building was for sale when the company was looking; it is unknown why Quality Laundry was selling the building. In 1960, Warley, Sr. purchased the company from his uncle to ensure that most of the company earnings were pumped back into the company. Ray Gibbs retired to Florida, where he died in 1976.

The Ray Gibbs Dealer for Cruisers, as the company was known in 1960, operated out of their location on West Gray for over fifty years before closing. The company sold only motor boats—never sail boats—including models from Johnson, Evinrude, and Grady-White. In 1982, during one of Houston’s oil booms, the Gibbs Boat Showroom was the largest Grady-White dealer in the country. In addition to whole boats, Gibbs Boat also sold parts and accessories, and provided repairs and maintenance help.

Gibbs Boats was one of the founding participants of the Houston Boat Show when it debuted at the Sam Houston Coliseum in 1955, and were regular donors to the 100 Club. Gibbs Boats also regularly provided aid to the Red Cross during regional disasters by providing boat support to the aid organization.

Gibbs Boat Showroom sold its last boat in 2012, coincidentally the same year the company last participated in the Boat Show, at which point they transitioned to providing boat repairs only. Warley Sr. never truly retired, and he died in his sleep on October 21, 2014 at age 90. His son, Warley, Jr., had been working at the store unofficially since 1965 and officially since 1967, and was ready to retire. Gibbs Boat Showroom had its last official day on December 31, 2014.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The Quality Laundry sits at the northwest corner of West Gray and Montrose Boulevard in a commercial corridor in Houston’s Montrose neighborhood. The building was constructed circa 1932 as a one-story brick Art Deco style commercial building for a laundry business. The building was expanded in 1966 and remodeled extensively in 1968. The 11,700 square foot building now has stucco panel cladding covering many of the original Art Deco details. The building can be read in three distinct sections: the 1932 commercial building, the 1968 showroom addition, and the 1968 two-story garage addition.

The 1932 flat-roof commercial building faces south onto West Gray. The south façade is symmetrical with a 24” stacked brick bulkhead. The fixed aluminum-frame windows on this elevation are arranged in an ABA pattern. The A-type windows are triple-grouped with corresponding transoms. The B-type opening is the entrance with paired pedestrian doors and a stacked transom. A large blue vinyl sign, originally reading “Gibbs” and now missing its “G,” is centered on the façade over the door. Selective demolition removed a section of the 1968 slipcover revealing the original fan light above the front entry, flanking fluted pilasters, and remnants of the original stucco finish.

Many of the original Art Deco details are more clearly visible on the west elevation of the 1932 showroom including cast stone fluted pilasters each capped with a stylized palmette and acroterion that pierces the parapet and neatly divides the elevation into five evenly spaced bays. The cornice line has a repeating Art Deco style chevron and stylized wave motif. There is a set of paired aluminum-frame fixed windows in the last bay, closest to the southern end, with a large blue vinyl sign reading "Gibb" above it. The next bay to the north contains a large overhead door for moving boats in and out of the showroom space. There is a floodlight located above this overhead door. The remaining bays have scars from where the original, evenly-spaced windows were located on this elevation.

The 1968 shed-roof steel-frame showroom addition dominates the east elevation. The showroom addition leaves one bay of the 1932 building's east elevation exposed. The single bay for the 1932 portion contains one triple-grouped set of fixed aluminum-frame windows as well as a large blue vinyl sign reading "Gibbs," the mirror image of the west elevation. The 1968 showroom addition continues the stacked brick bulkhead from the south façade, and it utilizes a continuous system of fixed aluminum frame windows without transoms. The thick lintel is clad in vertical sheet metal siding. The shed roof is clad with standing-seam sheet metal. There is a set of paired doors on the south elevation for the showroom addition; they are oversized doors and were used to transport boats in and out of the building. The southern doors have been blocked with a steel rail. A metal overhead door is centered on the north elevation for the showroom addition. There is also a single pedestrian door on the east end of the north elevation.

The 1968 garage addition is a prefabricated steel frame building attached to the north elevation of the 1932 section. The garage addition is a two-story building clad in a combination of painted concrete block and vertical corrugated sheet metal siding. There are two aluminum-frame sliding windows with safety bars on the garage addition: one on the east elevation, the other on the west end of the north elevation. The garage addition also has two identical metal pedestrian doors with a single light in the top half. One of these doors is located on the east end of the north elevation; the other is located at the south end of the west elevation. The dominant features of the garage addition, however, are located on the north elevation.

The north elevation contains two overhead doors on the first floor. Each overhead door is constructed from metal and has five evenly spaced lights running horizontally across the center line. There is also a large two-leaf sliding door on the second floor. A large steel hoist system is in place to load boats in and out of these sliding doors. The sliding doors are flanked by two floodlights.

The Quality Laundry retains its original Art Deco decorative elements on the south and west elevations and retains its integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling, and association with somewhat diminished integrity of design and workmanship. The building remains in its original location and setting, still part of a commercial corridor in a residential area. The building also retains its association with its second owner, the Gibbs Boat Company, who has owned and occupied the building since 1958, and its feeling as a boat showroom and repair facility. The Modern materials dating to 1968 were installed on top of the original Art Deco features, and elements of the original Art Deco details are visible on the west elevation and behind the selective demo on the south facade.

In May 2018, a new owner purchased the building and has plans to restore the exterior to its 1932 Art Deco appearance.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Lorelei Willett, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
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- ☐ ☒ (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- ☐ ☒ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- ☐ ☒ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

AND

- ☐ ☒ (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Quality Laundry Building at 1110 W Gray Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommended to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Quality Laundry Building at 1110 W Gray Street.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTO
QUALITY LAUNDRY BUILDING
1110 W GRAY STREET
CA. 1936



CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

DECEMBER 2017





A: Original Art Deco features and window scars on the west elevation, view east. December 2017

File: IMG_1382.JPG



B: Entrance detail; the original Art Deco arch over the entrance is visible next to the “ibbs” sign. December 2017

File: IMG_1385.JPG

EXHIBIT B
SITE MAP
QUALITY LAUNDRY BUILDING
1110 W GRAY STREET

